

Volunteers in Care Homes: A Collaborative Project Between Sutton Clinical Commissioning Group and Sutton College

Programme: Sutton Homes of Care Vanguard

10 November 2017

1.0 Executive summary

Sutton Homes of Care Vanguard (hosted by Sutton Clinical Commissioning Group, <http://www.suttonccg.nhs.uk/vanguard/Pages/default.aspx>) in collaboration with Sutton College (<https://www.suttoncollege.ac.uk/>), have developed an introduction to volunteering course for students interested in a career in social care. The project's aims were to increase the number of volunteers working in care homes, and to provide work experience within social care. The course ran for seven weeks, with placements provided by six care homes and ten people completing the course. The benefits included individualised one-to-one quality time for residents which enhanced their emotional and social wellbeing, and paid employment for the volunteer students after the end of the course. This course made a small contribution to developing the future workforce for social care and enabled more local people into employment. A further course is being set-up for 2018 and all Sutton's care homes are being encouraged to take part.

2.0 Background

Adult social care providers have great difficulty recruiting staff with an approximate vacancy rate of 7% for care workers, equating to about 90,000 vacancies nationwide (Skills for Care, 2017). In addition, the workforce turnover rate nationally within independent care providers is at 30%, indicating that retention of staff is also a challenge in this sector. Care homes in Sutton report difficulty recruiting both paid staff and volunteers into the care home environment. The Sutton Homes of Care Vanguard (the Vanguard) programme sought to address this issue by running a small project in collaboration with the local further education college in Sutton called Sutton College.

Following discussion with Sutton College, it was apparent that a number of local people were attending further education courses in order to gain skills to enable long term employment. The College's strategic objectives include enhancing enterprise and employer engagement and meeting the London Borough of Sutton's employability needs by enabling adults into employment. Sutton College agreed to run a new 'Health and social care volunteer course' with a view to offering people the opportunity to gain valuable work experience in the care sector that would enhance their employability. The Vanguard's roles would be to enable access to interested care homes (initially nursing and residential homes for older people) and provide support for the project.

3.0 Setting up the course

Through the Vanguard, nursing and residential care homes for older people were invited to participate. Six care homes came forward. Prior to the course, each home had to determine what activities the volunteer would be undertaking, how many volunteers they could accommodate and what days and times would be suitable for the home. Care home managers were also asked to complete a risk assessment to identify any risks to volunteers,

staff and residents and explain any control measures already in place along with any further actions needed.

Using the expertise of the College's tutors, who currently provide City and Guilds qualifications in health and social care, a seven- week course was developed (see Table 1).

Table 1: Outline content of Health and Social care volunteer course			
Week	Venue	Time	Activity
1	College	4 hours	Introduction to: adult social care sector including types of settings, different client groups and types of support available to clients values and principles of adult social care including person-centred care and code of conduct for care workers Infection control including hand washing
2	College	4 hours	Introduction to: skills and attitudes needed to work in adult social care communication in adult social care role and responsibilities of the adult social care worker including risk awareness dementia care Introduction to the placements including meeting the care home managers and activity coordinators
3-6	Care home placement	Variable	Working alongside activity coordinators and care home residents One 1-hour observation of volunteer by course tutor to provide developmental feedback (week 4 or 5)
7	College	4 hours	Feedback session including sharing experiences, evaluating the course and confirming longer-term outcomes for volunteers

Volunteers for the course were recruited by Sutton College using general marketing within the college and targeted promotion with learners on Skills for Life courses, including English, maths, and English as a second language and Learners with Difficulties and Disabilities. All candidates were then interviewed and asked to provide documents for a standard Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. The DBS check was undertaken by Sutton College and a total of 12 people were recruited onto the course. College tutors matched the volunteers to the care homes based on the volunteers' skills and areas of interest, and the care homes' list of requirements

4.0 Outcomes

The participating care homes included two residential care homes (between 20-40 beds each) and four nursing care homes (between 20-80 beds each). Twelve participants began the course and ten completed it. The course ran for seven weeks during July and August 2017 as outlined in Table 1. The volunteers spent a variable amount of time in their care home placement but the minimum requirement from the care homes was 6 hours each week. Volunteers undertook a wide range of activities with residents in both one-to-one and group activities and some of these activities are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Activities supported by volunteers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting residents with making drinks • Supporting residents to take meals • Engaging with residents e.g. listening to residents, discussing life stories, reading, having conversations, sharing the newspaper • Contributing to writing the monthly newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor exercise related activities e.g. ball games, sitting netball • Indoor social related activities e.g. dancing, puzzles, art projects, games, quizzes, painting • Accompanying residents on trips outside the home

At the end of the course, both volunteers (12) and care home managers (6) were asked to complete an evaluation form to give feedback on the course, their experiences and any changes they would suggest for future programmes. A total of 16 forms were returned (10 volunteers, 6 managers). Of the ten volunteers who completed the course, six have been offered permanent employment in the care home where they had their placement. The course also proved valuable for two other participants who decided that the social care sector was not suitable for them. The outcomes are unknown for the final two participants. Table 3 provides lists of the benefits for the volunteer, the care home and the residents.

Table 3: Identified benefits of the course to different stakeholders
Benefits to the resident
A new face to add variety to the day One-to-one time to undertake activities tailored to their needs and interests Additional support available during mealtimes and for refreshments Opportunity to share their life experiences with people who have the time to listen
Benefits to the volunteer
Work experience in a care setting Opportunity to share skills and life experiences Opportunity to continue working in the care home on a voluntary basis Potential offer of paid employment following the course
Benefits to the care home
Quality time with the residents as they are not involved directly in care An extra person in the home to help Being able to offer more residents tailored one to one time (or more frequently) Time
Benefits to Sutton College
Contribution to meeting strategic objectives including Enhancing Enterprise and Employer Engagement and meeting Local authority's employability needs
Benefits to Sutton Homes of Care Vanguard
Opportunity to influence the number of volunteers in care homes Opportunity to explore a different way of increasing access to volunteers by care homes

"She was very caring and comforting"

"Course was perfect- gave me an insight of what the job would be like"

"There is never enough time to spend with residents depending on their needs- the volunteer gave their time"

The overarching aim of the Vanguard is to improve the quality of life for care home residents. From the feedback received it is clear that the main benefit for the resident is additional time for personalised one to one activities which should impact positively on residents' quality of life.

5.0 Costs

Costs were incurred by Sutton College which include tutor time (3 X 4-hour class sessions plus 1 hour per learner workplace assessment), overheads, marketing and DBS checks (£15 each, total £180). The course was financed through the Community Learning budget. The cost to the care home was the initial staff time to support the volunteer settle into the environment. There was no cost to the volunteer or the Vanguard.

6.0 Key learning and recommendations

This initiative was a small pilot and several lessons have been learnt. Care home managers had a clear idea what activities volunteers could be involved with however the process for recruiting volunteers into care home is difficult and variable. Although some homes offer educational placements to further education college students, not many care homes offer work experience. In order to set this course up, a link between Sutton College and Sutton care homes was required. This was provided by the Vanguard however in other areas a different approach may be required if there is not a local care home network or forum. Feedback from both managers and volunteers identified that the volunteers would benefit from having a greater knowledge of dementia prior to placements and from visiting the allocated care home before commencing their placement.

7.0 Conclusions and next steps

This small project sought to enhance the number of volunteers in Sutton care homes for the elderly, whilst giving participants valuable work experience in the social care setting. These aims were achieved and the course was perceived positively by all stakeholders involved. Six out of the ten (60%) participants were offered permanent employment; benefiting both the care home and the volunteer. Following the success of this course, it will be run again by Sutton College in 2018. Six care homes for the elderly provided placements for volunteers and the managers will share their experience at the care home managers' forum in December 2017. It is hoped that this will inspire additional care homes to participate in the next course to widen the variety of placement settings available to volunteers. This course has illustrated how a relatively low-cost initiative can impact on the social care workforce, and therefore the learning from this initiative will be shared widely to inform the local workforce strategy for social care.

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Reference: Skills for care. 2017. The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England. Available at: <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/NMDS-SC-intelligence/NMDS-SC/Workforce-data-and-publications/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector.aspx>